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SUBJECT: TAIWAN-JAPAN RELATIONS QUITE POSITIVE NOW BUT
CONCERNS ABOUT THE FUTURE

REF: TAIPEI 2495

CLASSIFIED BY: AIT DIRECTOR STEPHEN M. YOUNG, REASONS: 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: RELATIONS BETWEEN TAIWAN AND JAPAN HAVE IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY UNDER THE CURRENT DPP ADMINISTRATION BECAUSE OF CONCERNS IN JAPAN ABOUT THE PRC AND THE RISE OF A NEW GENERATION OF JAPANESE DIET MEMBERS FAVORABLE TO TAIWAN. SOME OBSERVERS PERCEIVE KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU AS ANTI-JAPANESE AND ARE CONCERNED THAT A RETURN TO POWER BY THE KMT AFTER THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COULD LEAD TO A REGRESSION IN JAPAN-TAIWAN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

OVERVIEW OF TAIWAN-JAPAN RELATIONS

¶2. (C) RELATIONS BETWEEN TAIWAN AND JAPAN HAVE IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY IN RECENT YEARS, ESPECIALLY SINCE PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN TOOK OFFICE IN 2000, ACCORDING TO JAMES LIAO OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EAST ASIAN RELATIONS IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MOFA). THIS IS DUE IN LARGE PART TO GROWING CONCERNS WITHIN THE DPP AND IN JAPAN OVER THE PRC'S INCREASING REGIONAL CLOUT AS WELL AS THE RISE OF A NEW GENERATION OF JAPANESE DIET MEMBERS WHO ARE LESS INTERESTED IN MAKING AMENDS TO CHINA AND MORE CONCERNED WITH PUTTING THE INTERESTS OF JAPAN FIRST.

¶3. (C) HSU CHIEH-LIN OF THE JAPAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE TOLD AIT THAT TAIWAN'S DECISION LAST YEAR TO INCORPORATE THE UNOFFICIAL ASSOCIATION OF EAST ASIAN RELATIONS (AN ORGANIZATION SIMILAR TO TECRO FOR HANDLING TAIWANS RELATIONS WITH JAPAN) INTO MOFA PROPER SHOWED THAT THE CHEN ADMINISTRATION IS RAISING THE PROFILE OF RELATIONS WITH JAPAN. HSU SUGGESTED THAT PERCEIVED STRAINS IN TAIWAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES HAVE BEEN ONE FACTOR MOTIVATING TAIPEI TO SEEK CLOSER TIES WITH JAPAN. HE ACKNOWLEDGED, HOWEVER, THAT SUPPORT FOR TAIWAN BY JAPAN IS, FOR THE MOST PART, LIP SERVICE. IF THE UNITED STATES DID NOT SUPPORT TAIWAN IN THE EVENT OF ARMED HOSTILITIES WITH THE PRC, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT JAPAN WOULD INVOLVE ITSELF EITHER.

¶4. (C) ACCORDING TO THE JAPAN INTERCHANGE ASSOCIATION (JIA), RELATIONS BETWEEN JAPAN AND TAIWAN ARE GOOD OVERALL. ECONOMIC CHIEF MASAHIKO SUGITA TOLD AIT THAT WHILE THE JAPANESE PUBLIC HAS LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF AND IS THEREFORE AMBIVALENT ABOUT TAIWAN, MOST POLITICIANS AND OFFICIALS HAVE

A FAVORABLE OPINION OF TAIWAN. THEREFORE, DESPITE THE LACK OF FORMAL DIPLOMATIC TIES, TAIWAN AND JAPAN STILL COORDINATE EFFECTIVELY THROUGH UNOFFICIAL CHANNELS ON ISSUES SUCH AS FISHING, TRADE AND INVESTMENT, EXPORT CONTROLS, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT. WHILE TAIWAN WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ESTABLISH BILATERAL DEFENSE TIES WITH JAPAN, THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT IS RELUCTANT TO DO SO BECAUSE OF POSSIBLE REACTIONS FROM THE PRC, SUGITA CONTINUED. RATHER, JAPAN WOULD PREFER TO HANDLE ANY MILITARY COORDINATION THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK OF THE US-JAPAN SECURITY RELATIONSHIP, THOUGH SUGITA ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE IS NO CONSENSUS IN THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT AS TO HOW SUCH COORDINATION WOULD TAKE PLACE. (NOTE: THE JIA IS THE UNOFFICIAL JAPANESE REPRESENTATIVE OFFICE IN TAIWAN. END NOTE.)

MA'S TRIP TO JAPAN

15. (C) WHILE JAPAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE RULING DEMOCRATIC PROGRESSIVE PARTY (DPP) ARE GOOD, ITS RELATIONS WITH THE OPPOSITION KUOMINTANG (KMT) ARE ALMOST NONEXISTENT. THIS ABSENCE OF RELATIONS IS ONE REASON WHY KMT CHAIRMAN (AND TAIPEI MAYOR) MA YING-JEOU'S JULY VISIT TO JAPAN DID NOT GO AS SMOOTHLY AS INTENDED (SEE REFTTEL), ACCORDING TO MOFAS LIAO. MOST JAPANESE SEE THE KMT -- AND MA IN PARTICULAR -- AS BEING ANTI-JAPAN AND PRO-UNIFICATION WITH MAINLAND CHINA. IN AN EFFORT TO CHANGE NEGATIVE JAPANESE PERCEPTIONS, MA STRESSED DURING HIS VISIT THAT THE KMT IS NOT ANTI-JAPAN AND THAT WHILE THE KMT DOES NOT OPPOSE UNIFICATION WITH THE PRC, UNIFICATION WOULD REQUIRE BOTH DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE PRC AND THE APPROVAL OF THE PEOPLE OF TAIWAN.

16. (C) SOME KMT LEGISLATORS SUGGESTED TO AIT THAT MA'S TRIP MADE SOME PROGRESS IN FOSTERING UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE KMT. THAT WAS ALSO, NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE KMT'S PUBLIC LINE. JIA'S SUGITA, HOWEVER, COUNTERED THAT MA'S TRIP

DID NOT IMPROVE JAPANESE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE KMT, IN PART BECAUSE MA'S VISIT WENT LARGELY UNNOTICED BY THE JAPANESE PUBLIC, WHOSE ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED ON THE NORTH KOREAN MISSILE TESTS. FURTHERMORE, MA'S STATEMENTS ON THE SENKAKU ISLANDS (DIAOYUTAI) DISPUTE AND PM KOIZUMI'S VISITS TO THE YASUKUNI SHRINE ONLY REINFORCED PERCEPTIONS OF HIM AS BEING ANTI-JAPAN. JIAS DIRECTOR, RETIRED AMBASSADOR TADASHI IKEDA, TOLD AIT DIRECTOR YOUNG AS WELL THAT HIS GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC WAS UNDERWHELMED BY MA'S DISCUSSION OF DEFENSE ISSUES, AMONG OTHER THINGS.

WRINKLES IN TAIWAN-JAPAN RELATIONS

17. (C) FISHING DISPUTES IN THE OVERLAPPING EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ) CLAIM AREAS BETWEEN TAIWAN AND JAPAN ARE THE ONLY REAL POINT OF CONTENTION IN TAIWAN-JAPAN RELATIONS, MOFA'S LIAO TOLD AIT. TAIWAN'S PROXIMITY TO THE RYUKYU ISLANDS MEANS THAT FISHERMEN OPERATING OUT OF ILAN COUNTY IN NORTHEAST TAIWAN FIND THEMSELVES IN THE JAPANESE-CLAIMED EEZ JUST A FEW KILOMETERS OFF THE TAIWAN COAST. TAIWAN HAS PROPOSED ADJUSTING THE MARITIME BORDER TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF TAIWAN'S LARGER POPULATION, THOUGH NO AGREEMENT HAS YET BEEN REACHED ON THIS PROPOSAL.

18. (C) BOTH LIAO AND SUGITA SEPARATELY AGREED THAT WHILE KOIZUMI'S VISITS TO THE YASUKUNI SHRINE HAVE CAUSED CONSIDERABLE FRICTION WITH CHINA AND SOME OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION, THEY ARE A NON-ISSUE WITH THE DPP ADMINISTRATION, WHOSE TAIWANESE SUPPORTERS TEND TO BE PRO-JAPANESE. DPP POLLING CENTER DIRECTOR CHANG YU-FEN POINTED OUT THAT TO THIS DAY TAIWAN'S COLONIAL EXPERIENCE UNDER JAPAN AFFECTS ATTITUDES IN TAIWAN. AS AN EXAMPLE, SHE POINTED OUT THAT KMT LEGISLATIVE SPEAKER WANG JIN-PYNG, A NATIVE TAIWANESE, PREFERS WATCHING BASEBALL, WHICH WAS BROUGHT TO TAIWAN BY THE JAPANESE AND IS POPULAR AMONG YOUNG TAIWANESE, WHILE MA YING-JEOU, A MAINLANDER, PREFERS WATCHING BASKETBALL, THE SPORT OF CHOICE FOR MAINLANDERS.

EFFECTS OF UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN JAPAN AND TAIWAN

¶9. (C) SUGITA PREDICTED THAT THE SEPTEMBER ELECTION FOR THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LDP) PRESIDENCY IN JAPAN, WHICH WILL DETERMINE THE SUCCESSOR TO PM KOIZUMI, WILL NOT AFFECT JAPAN-TAIWAN RELATIONS. BOTH CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY SHINZO ABE AND FOREIGN MINISTER TARO ASO, THE CURRENT FRONT-RUNNERS IN LDP POLLS, SHARE PM KOIZUMI'S INTEREST IN FURTHERING JAPAN-TAIWAN RELATIONS, HE EXPLAINED.

¶10. (C) A VICTORY BY KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU IN THE 2008 TAIWAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COULD STRAIN JAPAN-TAIWAN RELATIONS FOR TWO REASONS, SUGITA SUGGESTED. WHILE JAPAN HAS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DPP, IT DOES NOT HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE KMT DUE IN LARGE PART TO A DEARTH OF JAPAN SPECIALISTS AND JAPANESE-SPEAKERS IN THE KMT. (NOTE: OF COURSE, THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF JAPAN'S INVASION OF NATIONALIST CHINA IN THE 1930S IS ALSO A FACTOR, THOUGH SUGITA DID NOT MENTION THIS. END NOTE.) MOREOVER, THE KMT MAINTAINS ITS RELATIVELY HARD-LINE TRADITIONAL POSITIONS ON DISPUTES SUCH AS ISLAND CLAIMS AND HISTORICAL ISSUES SUCH AS THE YASUKUNI VISITS, WHICH COULD SIGNIFICANTLY HAMPER NEGOTIATION ON OTHER AREAS OF JAPAN-TAIWAN RELATIONS. RELATIONS WITH JAPAN UNDER FORMER KMT PRESIDENT LEE TENG-HUI BENEFITED FROM LEE'S DEEP AFFECTION FOR JAPAN, NURTURED IN PART BY HIS STUDIES AT KYOTO UNIVERSITY DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) ALL OF THE POLITICIANS, OFFICIALS, AND ACADEMICS WITH WHOM AIT SPOKE PAINTED A RELATIVELY POSITIVE PICTURE OF CURRENT RELATIONS BETWEEN JAPAN AND TAIWAN, WHICH ARE NOT BURDENED BY THE STANDARD STICKING POINTS THAT SOUR RELATIONS BETWEEN JAPAN AND CHINA AND SOME OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE REGION. THE POSSIBLE RETURN TO POWER IN 2008 BY THE KMT COULD PRESENT CHALLENGES TO CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN TAIWAN AND JAPAN, BECAUSE WHILE THE DPP SEES JAPAN AS A NATURAL ALLY AGAINST THE PRC, THE KMT COULD KEEP A GREATER DISTANCE FROM JAPAN IN ORDER TO PURSUE CLOSER TIES WITH THE MAINLAND. HOWEVER, KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU, WHO HAS STRESSED THAT HE

IS NOT ANTI-JAPANESE AS SOME HAVE ASSERTED, MAY HAVE ONE MORE OPPORTUNITY TO ALTER JAPANESE PERCEPTIONS OF HIM AND THE KMT BEFORE HIS TERM AS TAIPEI MAYOR EXPIRES, AS HE HAS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN RETURNING TO JAPAN TO COMPLETE HIS JULY VISIT, WHICH WAS CUT SHORT BECAUSE OF TROPICAL STORM BILIS.

¶12. (U) THIS CABLE WAS DRAFTED BY POL INTERN EUGENE CHEN. YOUNG